

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-07 SAJ-01 OMB-01 IO-13
SSM-03 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 /083 W
-----241426Z 022537 /44

O R 241342Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2806
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0273

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MOPS, LE, SY
SUBJECT: ARAB SECURITY FORCE MOVES AGAINST CHRISTIANS AND
PALESTINIANS

1. SUMMARY. SYRIAN ARAB SECURITY FORCE (ASF) IN EAST BEIRUT
AREA HAS SUDDENLY GROWN FROM SOME 600 TO SOME 3,000 TROOPS.
CHRISTIANS HAVE REACTED WITH ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE "GENERAL
STRIKE." SIMULTANEOUSLY, ASF ELEMENTS HAVE REPORTEDLY MOVED
SOUTHWARD FROM JAZZIN REGION TOWARDS NABATIYAH, A KEY ROAD
JUNCTION NORTH OF THE LITANI. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE OF ANY
OTHER ASF MOVEMENTS SOUTHWARD AT THIS TIME. END SUMMARY.

2. ASF MOVES IN FORCE INTO EAST BEIRUT. FROM VARIOUS
SOURCES, WE UNDERSTAND THAT SYRIAN ASF FORCES IN CHRISTIAN
EAST BEIRUT AND SUBURBS, PARTICULARLY SIN EL FIL, FURN ES
CHEBBAK AND ANTILIAS, WERE SUDDENLY STRENGTHENED OVER THE
WEEKEND. EARLIER, SOME 600 SYRIAN TROOPS WERE IN AREA,
ON BASIS OF EARLIER UNDERSTANDINGS REACHED BETWEEN
SYRIANS, CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, AND PRESIDENT SARKIS.
SYRIANS NOW REPORTEDLY NUMBER ABOUT 3,000. ASF APPARENTLY
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ATTEMPTED TO TAKE OVER SEVERAL BUILDINGS BEING USED BY
MILITIAS AS BARRACKS OVER WEEKEND OF JAN 22/23, BUT DATT
RECON AS OF 1400 JAN 24 INDICATED UNARMED CHRISTIAN
MILITIA STILL OCCUPYING THESE INSTALLATIONS. BRAZILIAN
CHARGE TOLD CHARGE JAN 24 THAT HE HEARD SOME HALF
DOZEN ARTILLERY ROUNDS IN BAABDA AREA NIGHT OF JAN 23-24
AND WAS TOLD THEY WERE CHRISTIANS FIRING AT SYRIAN

POSITIONS. HOWEVER, WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION.

3. CHRISTIANS REACT. ASF MOVE CAME IN MIDST OF WEEKEND POLITICAL CONFERENCE OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS (SEE SITREPS). BECHIR GEMAYEL (AS LEADER OF CHRISTIAN MILITARY UNIFIED COMMAND) AND DANY CHAMOUN (AS LEADER OF NLP "TIGER" MILITIA) REPORTEDLY CALLED IMMEDIATELY ON PRESIDENT SARKIS, WHO, ACCORDING TO A WELL-INFORMED CHAMOUNIST SOURCE, SAID HE WAS NOT INFORMED OF THE ASF ACTION. BECHIR GEMAYEL IS QUOTED IN ARAB WORLD JAN 24 AS SAYING, "THE MOVE TOOK US BY SURPRISE, BUT WE ARE ALWAYS IN UNDERSTANDING WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS." IN REACTION, BECHIR GEMAYEL THEREUPON LATE JAN 23 PASSED THE WORD TO CHRISTIAN MILITIA UNITS TO ENFORCE A "GENERAL STRIKE" TO BEGIN EARLY JAN 24. WE UNDERSTAND THAT SCHOOLS AND MOST SHOPS IN ASHRAFIYAH ARE CLOSED. AN NAHAR SAYS "UNIFIED COMMAND" HAS CALLED OPEN EMERGENCY MEETING.

4. ASF MOVING TOWARDS NABATIYAH IN SOUTH. ACCORDING TO BOTH AL BAYRAQ AND AS SSFIR JAN 24, ASF ELEMENTS BEGAN 23 TO MOOE SOUTHWARD FROM AREAS OF JAZZIN AND JBAA TOWARDS TOWN OF NABATIYAH, AND VILLAGE OF KFAR TEBNIT. AS SAFIR SAYS ASF ESTABLISHED POSITIONS OUTSIDE NABATIYAH, AT ZOUTER, LATE JAN 23. AL BAYRAQ SAYS ASF IS "EXPECTED" TO ENTER NABATIYAH PROPER ON JAN24. GENERAL MOVEMENT OF ASF SOUTHWARD IN JAZZIN-NABATIYAH AREA IS CONFIRMED BY INTELLIGENCE SOURCES. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION, HOWEVER, ON STRENGTH OR COMPOSITION OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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FORCE, OR WHETHER IT IS SYRIAN OR OF OTHER ASF NATIONALITIES (SAUDI, SUDANESE, UAE). WE HAVE NO REPEAT NO INFORMATION SUGGESTING THAT THERE HAS BEEN ANY ASF MOVEMENT SOUTHWARD ALONG THE COAST FROM ZAHRANI OR EASTWARD FROM ZAHRANI ALONG THE PRINCIPLE SOUTHERN ROUTE INLAND (TO NABATIYAH).

5. COMMENT: THESE PRELIMINARY REPORTS SUGGEST THAT ASF MAAY HAVE TAKEN A SURPRISE DOUBLE MOVE OVER WEEKEND OF JAN 21-23, AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS IN EAST BEIRUT AND AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS IN THE SOUTH, PERHAPS IN CONTEXT OF COLLECTION OF HEAVY ARMS. ASF FORCES HAVE SO FAR REMAINED NORTH AND WEST OF THE LITANI AND THERE IS NO INDICATION THEY INTEND TO CROSS IT. WHETHER ASF MOVED WITH OR WITHOUT PRESIDENT SARKIS' KNOWLEDGE OR APPROVAL IS AN OPEN QUESTION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ARMED FORCES, TROOP DEPLOYMENT, CHRISTIANS, PALESTINIANS, SECURITY
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 24-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BEIRUT00273
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770025-0183
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770126/aaaaawla.tel
Line Count: 114
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: b6b1b7d2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3526026
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ARAB SECURITY FORCE MOVES AGAINST CHRISTIANS AND PALESTINIANS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MOPS, LE, SY
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b6b1b7d2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009